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ABSTRACT

Music can exert a positive effect on a reading program both in complementary skill development and as a means of forcing task attention. These positive effects have been documented in research. Both music and reading require skills such as auditory and visual discrimination, reception, and association; eye-motor coordination; interpretation; word meanings in and out of context; and language reception. The integration of music and reading provides an excellent instrument for the whole language approach. Thus, music is a natural ally of the reading teacher both as a motivational tool and a vehicle for instruction. (Eleven references are attached.) (Author/SR)

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Reading and Music:
Take Note

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Summary

Music can exert a positive effect on a reading program both in complementary skill development and as a means of forcing task attention. These positive effects have been documented in research. Both music and reading require skills such as auditory and visual discrimination, reception, and association; eye-motor coordination; interpretation; word meanings in and out of context, and language reception. The integration of music and reading provide an excellent instrument for the whole language approach. Thus, music is a natural ally of the reading teacher both as a motivational tool and a vehicle for instruction.

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Reading and Music:
Take Note

Music, the universal language, is a joy. Its great appeal to children of all ages makes music a valuable motivational aid for the teaching of reading, writing, and other areas of language arts. The infinite variety of activities can be enjoyed by students of the wide range of abilities and reading levels found in a typical elementary class. In addition to the skill development enhanced by music, these activities can also provide a needed change of pace and a release for tension and energy.

Music activities often utilize a whole language approach and many music skills reinforce the skills taught in the reading class. Both areas require skills such as auditory and visual discrimination, reception, and association; eye-motor coordination; interpretation; word meanings in and out of context, and language reception.

Research

The use of music as a tool in effecting development of these skills has been the subject of some research. Choksy (1974) cites research reported by Friss which showed Hungarian children receiving daily music instruction via the Kodaly Method showed a marked improvement of achievement in other academic areas. This approach begins ear training at an early age and emphasizes music reading. In this methodology, the child learns music as he learns language, learning to read music as he learns to read words. Visitors of the San Jose Project, which also utilized the Kodaly Method, were "struck by the atmosphere permeating every class -- the total involvement of the children in the task at hand, the lack of discipline problems, the self-assurance of the students, the total absence of self-consciousness or fear as they dealt with new skills, new experiences..." (Choksy, 1981, p. xvi). This development of a positive self-image will reap a bountiful harvest of benefits not only in reading but in other academic and social areas as well.

McDonald (1975) cited research by Nicholson designed to determine the effect of music on improving abilities of slow learners, ages 6-8, in development of certain reading readiness skills. Results showed the implementation of a curriculum integrating music and reading readiness activities resulted in a significant increase in test scores in the Metropolitan Readiness Test and the Botel Test of Reading Achievement for these children. Zinar (1976) described a study by Movsesian which found the experimental groups that learned how to read music made greater gains than the control group which did not receive music reading instruction. Zinar (1976) also cited Seides' work which demonstrated that slow adolescent readers with innate music talent benefit in reading, arithmetic, and personal adjustment as a result of music lessons.

Hirst and O'Such (1979) reported positive results toward reading improvement utilizing musical television commercials. In a three-month experiment in Appalachia, 8-10 -year-old special education students learned their favorite jingles through a three-step format. During the three months these students averaged more than one year's gain in reading. The research cited above emphasizes the importance of music in the total curriculum.

Integration of Reading and Music Skills

Language Reception

One of the critical areas of language development is the ability to listen to and understand spoken language. Almost from birth children are expected to demonstrate some proficiency in language reception. Comprehension of oral material is constantly demanded of the student whether it be understanding directions or gleaning facts from material read orally. Introducing children to folk tales and ballads can strengthen these listening and comprehensive skills. Folk literature with repetitive phrases or refrains make active listeners of children. Tales such as "The Gingerbread Man" allow children to sing along and become part of the story. "The anticipation created by becoming a partner in the story-telling can motivate children to attend carefully and listen attentively. Heightened level of participation can create heightened level of attention" (McDonald, 1975, p. 876).

Auditory

Development of auditory skills with music is a natural extension of reading instruction. The reader must develop the ability to distinguish between sounds in sentences, words, and letters. Listening activities in music give practice in recognizing sounds made with instruments and voices. Students learn to identify which instruments are playing in a group of two or three by the differences in tone quality. Even human voices have varying tone qualities. Practice identifying from where sound is coming, the range of pitch, and the intensity of sound will sharpen the students' acuity for distinguishing differences. This heightened auditory perception can be applied to the sounding out of initial and final consonants plus vowel sounds in proper pronunciation of words.

Auditory reception in hearing spoken language is paralleled in hearing music sounds. Readers must acquire the ability to interpret spoken sounds and relate concepts which are presented orally. Practice repeating rhythmic or melodic patterns by clapping or singing, memorizing songs and then singing notes in sequence and remembering which note comes next in a melody are musical activities to reinforce this auditory association ability.

Visual

The visual skills required in reading closely parallel those needed in music. Eye-motor coordination is a prime example. Readers of both books and music must use left to right eye fixation movements, return sweep of left to right reading, and top to bottom.

Visual reception, seeing letters, words, and pictures, can be reinforced in music by seeing musical notes and instruments. Recognizing the differences between graphic representations of letters and words can be strengthened with practice discriminating the graphic representations of notes of varying time or tone values. Showing students a visual representation of a simple rhythmic or melodic pattern, clapping or singing a simple pattern, and then asking students to indicate whether the two patterns are the same or different provide an opportunity to musically practice visual association.

Realizing that words and letters are written forms of the spoken language can be sustained through the association of specific notes with specific sounds and time values. Reading notes and translating them into actions, rhythms, and tunes will provide additional musical activities to reinforce the visual association related to reading.

Form constancy must be recognized by novice readers. They are required to absorb both upper and lower case manuscript and later cursive forms of letters. Beneficial musical activities include finding notes of the same time value regardless of color or, later, position on the staff, finding notes of the same pitch but different time values, and recognizing that notes on the chalk board or felt board have the same value as notes in sheet music.

Visual sequential memory enables the reader to remember sounds and words a sufficient length of time to obtain meaning from them. Retention of music material is optional unless retention is required for performance or specified memory work; however, memorization will supply excellent practice. Since songs do not generally have a "graded" vocabulary, the text should be brief to offer plenty of practice without extraneous obstacles to diminish interest. Action songs are especially useful. The large muscle movements employed in doing the action are additional reinforcements to memory.

The whole language approach can be utilized for these activities by placing the words on a chart for children to sing and do. After those words are easily recognized and understood, the sight vocabulary can be augmented by substituting another kind of action the students can perform.

Language charts with song lyrics can become a musical parallel of predictable books where students have an opportunity to build a vocabulary of words which are recognized by "sight" without phonic or structural analysis. The visual configuration and picture clues of those words will trigger the child's association of the words to the objects they represent if the objects are within the child's realm of past experiences. Such a chart with the words of a simple, repetitive song can serve as the stimulus for a series of activities similar to those described by Morris (1981) to teach the concept of word and high frequency words. After singing the song several times for the children, the teacher then presents the chart to the children and points to each word while singing. Children can join with the singing as the teacher points to the words. Soon individual children take their turns at finger-point reading of the words of the song. Students can be asked to identify individual words throughout the song. The teacher can assess the development of rudimentary skills by asking: Do the children point to each word correctly as they read

across the line (concept of word)? If they mismatch the spoken word to written word, do they self-correct without teacher assistance and continue reading? Can they identify individual words immediately or must they use contextual support by repeating an entire line or even the entire song? By introducing his beginning reading vocabulary through music, the child's psychological involvement in the experience is intensified and the range of clues on which he can rely is multiplied (Kukmerker, 1969).

Context Clues

Utilizing context clues is a reading skill of infinite importance. When all phonic and structural analyses fail, context can provide the key to word meaning. Nonsense songs are a delightful way to emphasize the value of context. Children enjoy laughing and telling why the words are silly. Carrying this over to reading, teachers can cultivate self-monitoring in individuals by stressing they ask themselves the question, "What would make sense here?" Training students to monitor their own reading can lead to increased comprehension (metacomprehension).

Mateja (1982) described a procedure based on cloze research but designed to increase language abilities using musical selections. Students are allowed to participate in a variety of cloze formats and discussions under the direction of the teacher. Songs are selected to fit learner characteristics and interests and the content of a particular unit. This musical cloze procedure has been successful at increasing students' language abilities while also improving their knowledge of vocabulary and music. As with the traditional cloze procedure, context clues are utilized by the reader.

Language Structure and Syntax

Songs can also provide experience with common phrase and sentence structures and syntax patterns through a whole language approach. Learning songs by rote gives the singer a natural feel for phrasing. Taylor (1981) used work by Rietz to point out that children's folksongs contain some of the structure of children's oral language, providing structural redundancy, and allowing simultaneous seeing and reading aloud. Utilizing a chart with song lyrics as described above could provide whole language experiences involving first the words of the song lyricist and then the words of the children.

Rietz (cited by Taylor, 1981) also tells how the transition from spoken to written language can be aided by an approach in which children learn about the structure of written language as they create variations for the words and phrases of folksongs. New verses to familiar simple songs can be created, necessitating the formation of whole phrases and/or complete sentences. This can serve as an introduction to the functional use of words such as descriptors, action words, and connecting words such as prepositions.

Oral Interpretation

Music and language are close relatives. The voice is a very expressive medium, conveying love and hate, acceptance and rejection, joy and dejection. The reader's oral interpretation of printed material can be enhanced with musical activities. Especially helpful is singing folk songs whose melodic contour closely

follows natural speech inflection. Pitch and rhythm can help differentiate characters and situations. Breathing only at the end of phrases while singing enables students to group words into meaningful combinations to be extended to spoken phrases.

Affective Domain Benefits

The affective domain benefits are varied but useful. Singing rounds or harmony or playing even simple instruments requires concentration and attention by the participants. Such activities engage students in a high level of involvement by everyone including those children who are social isolates and provide an opportunity to work together. Most adults can remember singing around a campfire or on a school bus as a youth. Once a song has been sung or played, the feeling of success that musicians experience is priceless. The positive individual and group self-esteem that results can then be applied to other academic and social experiences in the classroom.

Music Application for Adolescents

Most of the discussion to this point has been geared more toward elementary school classes. But what about the adolescent in remedial reading classes? In addition to poor reading skills, many of these students "approach printed material with apathy or hostility, and they lack motivation in an area in which they have failed before" (Newsom, 1979, p. 726). Teenagers do have one thing which they enjoy universally - music.

Newsom (1979) experienced great success using popular music in her ninth grade remedial reading classes. Prior to introducing the unit, the interest of the students was stimulated with a bulletin board display of song lyrics with articles about and pictures of popular singers and musicians. Textbooks were then temporarily set aside and the students studied from songs. Because Newsom found the pace of commercial materials too fast for her students, she used her own teacher-prepared skill sheets.

One day was devoted to word analysis, one day to vocabulary, and one day to comprehension. Skills reinforced with each song included long and short vowel patterns, suffixes, prefixes, rhyming words, antonyms, homonyms, synonyms, multiple word meanings, contractions, sequence, and comprehension. Lyrics of each song were duplicated so that the students could read along as the music was played. The format followed was that of the directed reading activity (p. 727). In addition to reading skills, the songs generated more discussion strengthening skills in oral communication. Both Newsom and her students agreed important reading skills can be mastered and reinforced with music.

Reduction of Interference

Anything that attempts to reduce interference or distraction and force attention to task increases the ability to remember. This is applicable to students of all ages. Clinical experience has shown that background music in a classroom screens out extraneous noise; however, the same music will not soothe all individuals. The kind of music best for each child may vary by tempo or metric pattern. However, a tape or recording can provide background music through headphones for a given child while others in the

room receive theirs openly. The quieter work habits and increased productivity under these conditions facilitate better learning.

This technique, useful for reading, can be extended to other areas of the curriculum with similar results. Davidson and Powell (1986) reported a significant increase on the on-task-performance of fifth grade students when easy-listening background music was played during science class. This use of music is easily applied at various times throughout the school day.

Conclusion

Music can exert a positive effect on a reading program both in complementary skill development and as a means of forcing task attention. The universal appeal of music and the variety it can bring make it a natural ally of the reading teacher. Creative movement, song, and dramatic expression plus the change of pace and the relaxing effects of song can be enjoyed by readers of varying abilities. Because development of language and the ability to recognize the symbols which represent language are such vitally important skills, children should have every opportunity to expand these skills. If music can aid the development of language skills, educators should explore and develop its use.

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